

# Proper equipment, constant awareness keys to defeating swift and silent killer

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I was stationed in Seoul, South Korea, in the 1970s and worked in the Joint Service Command Post on Yongson Compound.

Every year I read the reports on how the U.S. military had lost people to carbon monoxide poisoning.

Most frequently the deaths occurred because the small concrete-block houses outside the post often burned large charcoal bricks in a brazier to heat rooms during the cold winters.

All too frequently, someone would discover in the morning that a family had died of carbon monoxide poisoning during the night. Also, too frequently, there was a young U.S. Soldier among the dead.

We don't use charcoal bricks to heat our quarters, but carbon monoxide is produced whenever any fuel – such as gas, oil, kerosene, wood or charcoal – is burned.

## A swift and silent killer

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can kill a full-grown, healthy adult in minutes.

If appliances that burn fuel are maintained and used properly, the amount of carbon monoxide produced is usually not hazardous. However, if they are not working properly or are used incorrectly, dangerous levels of carbon monoxide can result.

Hundreds of people die accidentally every year from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by malfunctioning or improperly used fuel-burning appliances. Even more die from

### Carbon monoxide information online

American Lung Association <a href="http://www.lungusa.org">www.lungusa.org</a>	Environmental Protection Agency <a href="http://www.epa.gov">www.epa.gov</a>
Centers for Disease Control <a href="http://www.cdc.gov">www.cdc.gov</a>	National Library of Medicine <a href="http://www.nlm.nih.gov">www.nlm.nih.gov</a>
Consumer Product Safety Commission <a href="http://www.cpsc.gov">www.cpsc.gov</a>	U.S. Fire Administration <a href="http://www.usfa.fema.gov">www.usfa.fema.gov</a>

To place a service order with the 6th ASG Directorate of Public Works call 421-6200/civ. 0711-729-6200.

carbon monoxide produced by idling cars.

Camp stoves and heaters can also produce deadly levels of carbon monoxide.

Fetuses, infants, elderly people, and individuals with anemia or with a history of heart or respiratory disease are especially susceptible to the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide detectors and alarms have been placed in all Army family housing units equipped with gas stoves. Detectors have also been installed in the heating rooms in all single-family quarters with gas-burning furnaces.

These devices emit an audible alarm when they detect build-ups of harmful carbon monoxide gas resulting from the improper ventilation of burning fuels.

### Symptoms

- Low levels can cause shortness of breath, mild nausea and mild headaches, and may have longer-term effects.

- At moderate levels, symptoms include severe headaches, dizziness, mental confusion, nausea or loss of consciousness. Individuals can die if these levels persist.

- Since many of these symptoms are similar to those of the flu, food poisoning or other illnesses, the victim may not realize that carbon monoxide poisoning is the cause.

### Staying safe

- Keep fuel-burning appliances properly adjusted.
- Use the exhaust fan over the gas stove. This vents fumes outside.

If the carbon monoxide detector alarm goes off:

- Make sure it is the carbon monoxide detector, not the smoke detector.
- Check to see if any member of the household is experiencing symptoms of poisoning.
- If so, get the victim(s) out of the house immediately and seek medical attention. Tell the doctor that you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If no one has symptoms, turn off all potential sources of carbon monoxide and ventilate the home with fresh air.
- Remember: Call the DPW service order desk and submit a service order whenever the detector goes off – even if no one is experiencing symptoms. The detector needs to be checked for proper operation.
- Fuel-burning appliances and vents must also be checked to ensure they are operating correctly and that nothing is blocking ventilation.